

IMPACT REPORT:

What Your Support Makes Possible



Paola: Girls Inc. National Scholarship Awardee 2020

Gripping onto my seatbelt, I saw Fear smear across my dad's face as his eyes bounced from me to the police officer. Like a script that I rehearsed with my parents, I recited my prayers, home address, and the name of a relative that I had never met under my breath—yet he only asked for my name and age. I felt Fear caress my cheek. I hid behind it because Fear is what kept families together in my community. Without it, then people I love could be deported.

On my way home from school, Fear also followed in different forms. “Hey nena, where do you think you're going? Let me take you home,” called a man from a beaten up truck, sending goosebumps up my spine. At home, I scrutinized my outfit: ripped black jeans and my dad's jean shirt. Over time, I noticed my reflection begin to transform. It may have appeared to be mine, but I knew it was someone else's: Fear. When I participated in class, Fear rested his heavy hand against mine and whispered into my ear, “Calladita te ves más bonita; you're prettier when you keep your mouth shut.” People like me were not supposed to participate; we were not supposed to have answers.

In 8th grade, I began to attend Girls Inc. where I was asked about my future—which I had never thought about. To visualize our futures, we cut out pictures from magazines where I saw women of color advocating and taking a stance on immigration without Fear. When the time came to present our vision boards, I felt hope and my eyes filled with tears as I spoke about stereotypes, body image, and goals that I had buried deep inside. As I finished speaking, rather than being derided or discouraged, my peers applauded. At Girls Inc. I was supported for seeing the world through a different lens: One where I have the courage to face Fear and live without it.

I began to talk about sexual harassment at school, where other girls had also been keeping their experiences to themselves. I felt the need to act, so when I learned of the Girls Inc. Advocacy Program: Informed, In Charge, and In Action, I quickly applied. I was reminded that the problem was not with my body. It was not my clothes. It was not mine. Catcalls that once whispered into my ear were replaced with “I am bold” and “I am not alone.” I developed courage at Girls Inc. and realized that I dictate my own future, not Fear.

When I visited my mother's village in Mexico and saw the lack of access to education, medical care, and clean water, I knew that I wanted to become part of the necessary change in healthcare. I furthered my education by completing my Emergency Medical Responder Certificate alongside my general education college classes while in high school.

As a freshman at the University of California, San Diego, I plan to double major in Sociology and Global Health. I will conduct research alongside professors on how socioeconomic status impacts the quality of healthcare while building a community with my peers. **I am determined to attend medical school and develop a non-profit near my mom's village—where I hope to break the cycle of insufficient healthcare.** At times when I feel Fear's presence, Girls Inc. has taught me to push past the barriers that Fear created by furthering my education.